

## Anxiety Politics: Creativity and Feminist Christian Realism

### Abstract:

The aim of this article is to articulate Feminist Christian Realism and how it differs from Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian Realism. As one of the most influential Christian Realists, Niebuhr's thinking on world affairs continues to influence the discipline of International Relations and politicians. Fundamental to Niebuhr's thinking is how anxiety over human vulnerability is settled: either through destructive acts or creative acts. In light of feminist thought, Niebuhr's creativity in the face of anxiety needs to be reconsidered as it minimises the role of emotions, particularly love, and the perspective and experiences of individuals. Thus, Feminist Christian Realism agrees with Christian Realism that power and justice are important considerations, but that these need to be seen through a love-informed creative lens. In order to demonstrate how a creatively informed Feminist Christian Realism differs, the article starts and ends with different approaches to the threat of terrorism, which is a deeply anxious security concern in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Keywords: Christian realism, power, feminism, anxiety, creativity

The Syrian Civil War is one of the bloodiest wars in recent history. With multiple parties involved including state forces loyal to Assad, Hezbollah, Islamic State, and the Kurds, as well as a Russian presence, the fighting has been fierce and civilian casualties have been overwhelming—approaching 250,000 deaths as of August 2016 and 11 million displaced persons (BBC 2016). This war has also led to one of the largest refugee migrations seen in recent history. Even though the refugees are fleeing horrendous violence, many states, particularly wealthier Western states in Europe and the US (BBC 2016), have been reluctant to take them, limiting their number and making the refugees go through an extensive screening process (Fantz and Brumfeld 2015). While political and media discourse ties the reluctance to the

fear of overwhelming social services, it is also clear that there is a fear that the refugees are (radical Islamist) terrorists in disguise (Mosendz 2015).

Terrorism is one of the most anxiety inducing security threats of this time (Ahmed 2004; Massumi 2005; Daase and Kessler 2007; Gentry 2015a). As anxiety is about the *possibility* of a feared future event and terrorism inspires fear/terror through the *possibility* of another attack (see Schmid and Jongman 2006, 5), terrorism and anxiety are intimately connected. One way that anxious people deal with their anxiety is to create scapegoats; scapegoating is also often witnessed in terrorism (see Gentry 2015a). Thus, the Syrian refugees and indeed many people associated with Islam are scapegoated in the anxious fear that surrounds terrorism (Ahmed 2006; Gentry 2015a). Such a response is not helpful; scapegoating is an over-generalised reaction and the scapegoating of Muslims has led to further violence as mosques are vandalised or firebombed (ACLU 2016); women wearing hijab are assaulted (or barred from wearing it); and the rise in hate crimes against Muslims, such as the rise in the US after the San Bernardino shooting in December 2015 (Stack 2016). Thus scapegoating simply feeds into the destructive cycle of violence.

There is another way to think about anxiety and destructive responses to it.

According to Christian Realism, anxiety is a common response to human vulnerability.<sup>i</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, as a Christian Realist whose work continues to influence contemporary politics, wrote extensively about anxiety, primarily in in *The Nature and Destiny of Man, Volumes I and II* (1964 [1941 and 1942]). According to Niebuhr, humans, in response to anxiety, can either be destructive or creative.

Destruction is ultimately sinful. Creativity more recognises the relational dynamic

that exists between all humans. Yet, because Niebuhr tended towards pessimism about the human desire to seek power in the face of anxiety, he offers a clouded creativity of seeking justice through a balance of power (see in particular Niebuhr 1962).

This article seeks to redeem the pessimism within Christian Realism by reconceptualising it through feminist thought. Feminist Christian Realism revisits two key moments in Niebuhr's scholarship. First, when he determines that love cannot operate politically in *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932). Second, in his discussion of how to resolve the inherent anxiety within humans and human relations about individual and socio-political security. Feminist Christian Realism takes the tenets of Christian Realism seriously: that the human propensity to cling to power requires a redress, or the seeking of justice (Gentry 2016a). Given Niebuhr's historical and epistemological constraints, his Cold War thinking offers creative solutions. It is, however, compromised due to Niebuhr's own belief that love cannot be an ordering principle within political relations.

Therefore, Feminist Christian Realism differentiates itself from the Christian Realism that has come before by reengaging the importance of *agape*, or 'brotherly' love. Feminist Christian Realism departs from Niebuhr by re-investigating what a creative response to the moment of anxiety is. Creativity is entirely dependent upon empathetic love and relationality. Thus, Feminist Christian Realism engages a deeper notion of creativity through a conversation about the inherent commitments to community borne of one's relationship with God, including the recognition of obligation to others in the face of vulnerability. This is not an easy task and it requires

a level of attention and care to changing epistemic frameworks that feminists within International Relations have posed for decades.

Thus, this article will first engage in a quick discussion of two moments—the abandonment of love for justice alone and anxiety—before turning to examine how Niebuhr’s thinking is epistemologically limited. From here, the importance of creativity to theology is discussed, particularly how this relates to vulnerability and love. While the paper engages with post-modern thinkers on vulnerability and obligation it does within a broader conversation of what living within the *imago dei* (or in relationship with God) requires of Christians. From there, the paper builds upon the relationship between agape and creative acts before concluding with how Feminist Christian Realism offers a transformative approach to one of the most anxiety-producing security moments today: the threat and actuality of terrorist attacks.

### **The Moment of Anxiety**

Religious thinkers, like Reinhold Niebuhr, once had a place in IR. Niebuhr’s most influential period spanned pre-World War II to the mid-century; yet, religious voices have been replaced with approaches more dependent upon rationality and social science methodologies (Thomas 2010, 22; Ling 2014, xxii). There has been a resurgence, however, in the discussion of religion’s place in the field which has opened the door again to religious thought. Several key pieces looked at the role of religion in international politics, including Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of Civilisations* (1996), in which he believed the bloodiest future wars would be fought along religious fault lines. Another seminal text, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart’s

*Sacred and Secular* (2004), investigated the continued influence of religion, even as it was at odds with secularisation theory. They found that religious belief continues to be most present in societies that experience existential angst or anxiety about security. For example, the reason that religious belief is so important to US politics is owed to the greater poverty and social inequality there in comparison to its western European counterparts. Further importance has been given to studying religion with the perceived rise and dominance of ‘religious’ terrorism in the form of al Qaeda and IS (although these are such corrupted forms of Islam it may be more accurate not to refer to them as religious).

The problem, however, is that these studies treat religion as a variable or tradition that can be studied from afar, instead of allowing the perspective of a spiritual faith inform how one *thinks* about the field of IR and the subjects therein (for a deeper discussion of this see Lynch 2010). The importance of religion goes beyond a way of measuring or simply describing, religious voices also help us to take stock and to take a step back from the rational actor model that dominates some circles within IR. It allows those that are willing to engage with theology—of any stripe: Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindi, Jewish, etc.—to see issues, such as security dilemmas, from a broader and deeper perspective that maximises humanity’s commonalities and minimises our differences (see Lynch 2010, 58-59).

This article, as part of this special issue on political theology, is one of the latest interventions to bring back theological voices to IR. This article focuses on Reinhold Niebuhr because of his lasting influence and for his focus on power and justice. Reinhold Niebuhr advised most of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century American presidents and

later presidents and politicians, including Jimmy Carter, Barak Obama, and Hillary Clinton, cite his influence on their politics. While Christian Realist contemporaries of Niebuhr, such as Herbert Butterfield, were equally influential to the field, it is Niebuhr's influence that is cited over and over again. For instance, in 2009 Fareed Zakaria (*Newsweek* 2009) named Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932) as foundational to ethics and politics; *Foreign Policy* harkened back to Niebuhr to argue that 'America could use a little philosophical humility' in 2013 (Miller 2013); and in the summer of 2016, an opinion piece in *The Washington Post* argued that the current fractured politics in the US could be helped if it still had public religious leaders like Reinhold Niebuhr (Dionne, Jr. 2016). While some have tried to revive Christian Realism's relevance to IR, such as the work of Robin Lovin (1995; 2007; 2008), Eric Patterson (2003a; 2003b), Andrew Bacevich (2005; 2008a; 2008b), and Nigel Biggar (2013), this revival focuses on power at the structural level, which leaves this feminist wanting to see more on human behaviour and relationships (as Niebuhr actually tended to do) (see Gentry 2013).

Within mainstream IR, what is meant by security and how it is arrived at has been queried and problematised for close to three decades, starting with the constructivist turn (starting with Wendt [1992]) and the addition of post-structuralism (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998; Fierke 2015), feminism (Enloe 1989; Tickner 1992; Sylvester 1994, 1999, 2002; Sjoberg 2013), and post-colonialism (Said 1979; Ling 2002; Bilgin 2008). Yet when it comes to Christian Realism, the ontology of the state system and the epistemology of security have remained unchallenged. Even if Christian Realism aligns more closely with classical Realism with its focus on human behaviour (Morgenthau 1978), security within a Niebuhrian paradigm is tied to

masculine concerns of sovereignty and justice via the balance of power (see Gentry 2013, 66).<sup>ii</sup> Therefore, if Christian Realism has a place at all in progressive IR scholarship, it is not immediately apparent. This tradition, however, has more to offer, not just because pundits and politicians still rely upon it, but because it takes justice and power dominance (hierarchy) seriously. Furthermore, it helps scholars to reflect upon our values and query whether our scholarship reflects them. This is not to say that Christianity will hold the answer for all people—not by any stretch of the imagination. It is, however, to suggest that we should reflect upon our deeply held values, no matter what perspective these stem from (Lynch 2010).

Reinhold Niebuhr's theology on how power operates in the world is compelling. As much as I would like to be in a world where force and violence are not necessary features, this is not a possibility. Force, violence, and coercion are endemic features in this world. Because Christian Realism's ontology accepts evil exists in this world and fallible humans are vulnerable to it, humans feel anxiety acutely. Therefore, Christian Realism takes the human inclination to cling to power seriously. As such Christian Realism promotes balancing power as a way of arriving at justice. Thus, Christian Realism's focus on power balancing and justice provides a theologically grounded approach to security.

Yet, Niebuhr's security thinking is one borne out of a particularly ontology and epistemology that dominated political and international thought during the Cold War. It assumes a masculinist state-centric ontology: there are states and they are what is and human life and experience are not a concern (see Tickner 1992, 42). It accepts that the system is anarchic, which is another 'masculinist' move that minimises

human agency (Sylvester 1994, 321). Therefore, it adopts a particular epistemology of security: might makes right. Niebuhr may have resisted this, yet, he still arrived at the conclusion of nuclear deterrence, even if he called it a ‘balance of terror’ (Niebuhr 1962, 155), and he still saw the necessity of containment and coercive war (Niebuhr 1962).

In many respects, feminism seeks to redress the masculinist power imbalance within IR thinking. L. H. M. Ling’s *Imagining World Politics* (2014) creatively utilises Daoism—this book starts with a fable that serves to rebalance IR’s masculinist thinking—and begins to tell IR why both feminism and religious thinking has value. In her religious-philosophical approach to world politics, Ling argues that IR is all about ‘hardness’ as the male-dominated, Western/US-centric scholarship focuses mostly upon rationalism (Ling 2014, xxii). She argues that IR pursues ‘science’ and ‘human rationality’ without recognising that it perpetuates harms against ‘colonised Others, whether “at home” or “over there”’ (Ling 2014, xxiii). Therefore, her claim that IR has ‘lost...any sense of politics or humanity beyond state power’ is also central to my own queries; Ling continues:

In all the scurrying for power, we fail to ask: what is it *for*, to benefit *whom*, and at *whose* cost? Most crucially, we begin to turn away from ourselves. We avoid asking: do we agree with this vision for ourselves and for generations to come? (Ling 2014, xxiii).

She helps us to reflect upon this question: does our scholarship reflect the world we want future generations to inherit?



Therefore, this is where feminist Christian Realism diverges. Jean Bethke Elshtain (2000, 154), as a feminist (she was a forerunner in political and IR feminist thought [1981; 1987]) and as a theologian (her last position was the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Professor of Religious Ethics at Chicago), insisted that Christians must be aware of what is happening in the world, not just the ‘fullness, dignity, the irreducibility, the wonder at creation’ but also ‘the horror...the wanton destruction of creation’. Not only are there reflections of the balance that Ling (2014) seeks in Elshtain’s statement, but there are parallels in thinking towards the future. For Elshtain (2000), being aware of the wonder means we must address destruction—we must ask, is the destruction what we want to leave for the future or do we want to hope for something better?

Feminist Christian Realism is about hope and creative hope at that. Like Christian Realism, Feminist Christian Realism recognises both the human inclination towards power-seeking and that justice is a norm to be sought. Yet it asks for a different conceptualisation of security—a security beyond state power and military might—so that power be prioritised and wielded differently. This different notion of security would take the flourishing of communities as a starting point and it would use creativity to get there. Thus, this next section will revisit the two key moments in Niebuhr’s writings, the abandonment of love in politics and anxiety; Feminist Christian Realism offers a corrective to these two moments.

*Love and Anxiety: Compromises in Christian Realism*

Christians are required to love without expectation and without self-interest; this is *agape*, which is defined as non-erotic, fraternal love for the other (more will be said about the feminist engagement with love later). *Agape* is profoundly, transformationally disinterested in the Self. It is a purely selfless, obedient, unconditional love given because Christians have been commanded to love God, their neighbours, and then themselves (Jackson 2003, 2; see Ramsey 1954). *Agape* is concerned with, not threatened by, the needs and ‘well-being of the other,’ which requires an element of ‘self-sacrifice for the sake of the other’ (Jackson 2003, 10). Like the importance of Christ’s sacrifice, love ‘is the willingness to let the self be destroyed’ (Niebuhr, H. Richard 1956, 35). Respect for difference and acquiescence to disinterestedness is integral to *agape*. The person engaged in the act of loving cannot desire an outcome based upon his/her wants, needs, or claims, because a Christian ‘seeks not his own good, but the good of his neighbour’ (1 Corinthians 10:24 [NIV]; see also Ramsey 1954, 92).

Thus, when Niebuhr wrote about love in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, he grappled with the question of love and how *all* religions hold love at their centre (see also Gentry 2016b). Even though Niebuhr’s own contemporaries were writing that love could work politically (see Ramsey 1954; Niebuhr, H. Richard 1932), Niebuhr argued in *Moral Man* that it could not, after exploring both the contemporaneous social scientific move towards rationality for governing social and political behaviour as well as religious imperatives for shaping political life.

Whereas the-then-current social scientists thought rational behaviour would lead to a more beneficent society (not that this sentiment has lost much momentum [see for

instance Pinker 2011]), Niebuhr felt the power of rationality was overestimated. Nevertheless, Niebuhr (1932, 57) favours the aim of the rational ethic, justice, because it seems to be the only workable solution when contrasted with the religious ideal of love (1932, 57-60). Even though religion checks an individual's selfish impulse, religion is unduly 'occupied with the absolute from the perspective of the individual' (Niebuhr 1932, 60). This love-focused particular cannot be adequately operationalised to work in society at large (Niebuhr 1932, 60). Indeed, every time religion has applied love to a social problem 'it always gives birth to some kind of millennial hope' (Niebuhr 1932, 61). For Niebuhr, this hope is clearly far too idealistic and naïve. It cannot work in part because love is dependent upon proximity. Solutions based upon love and hope weaken as they move into the secular world, thereby disappointing all involved (Niebuhr 1932, 62, 73-4). Love weakens because cannot be relied upon as it may not be valued equally due to the plurality of morals, norms, and political persuasions (see Niebuhr 1932; Thompson 1975; Lovin 1995, 25-6). Therefore, justice offers a better alternative as it balances the competing morals, norms, and persuasions (Thompson 1975, 286; Lovin 1995, 26, 70-1).

Niebuhr's abandonment of love to what is ostensibly the private sphere—love functions in small groups of people that are brought together through proximity and the particular—then informs how Niebuhr deals with the problem of anxiety in the public sphere. According to Niebuhr, anxiety is an outcome of human limitations (Niebuhr 1964, 168, 174, 185). Humans are fallible creatures which limits them from grasping full knowledge and the entirety of the will of God (Niebuhr 1964, 168). While God gave humans agency and freedom, humans must recognise their limitations (Lovin 1995, 123) because sin, idolatry, and injustice are a result of

humanity's inclination to overstep its boundaries (Niebuhr 1964, 164-5). Niebuhr argues the 'real evil in the human situation' is

man's [sic] unwillingness to recognise and acknowledge the weakness, finiteness and dependence of his position, in his inclination to grasp after a power and security which transcend the possibilities of human existence (Niebuhr 1964, 137).

Evil happens when 'the fragment seeks by its own wisdom to comprehend the whole or attempts by its own power to realise it' (Niebuhr 1964, 168). For Niebuhr this demonstrates a paradox between relying upon God in times of trouble and humans' fundamental anxiety-driven instinct to create their own security, even if this leads to their own destruction: 'the most obvious meaning of history is that every nation, culture, and civilisation brings destruction upon itself by exceeding the bounds of creatureliness which God has set upon all human enterprises' (Niebuhr 1964, 140; see also Gentry 2013, 67-70).

This vulnerability regarding security feeds anxiety, which leads either to creativity or sin (Niebuhr 1964, 168, 174, & 185). According to Niebuhr, anxiety-ridden people turn to power and to pride (Niebuhr 1964, 178). Power mitigates feelings of insecurity, even if power cannot guarantee absolute security and even if it problematically pits people against each other (Niebuhr 1964, 174). Anytime power is concentrated, it will 'generat[e] injustices' (Niebuhr 1962, 156). Thus, Niebuhr reiterates the importance of justice to Christian realism. Justice is arrived at through the balance of power; this could be the inherent checks and balances within a democracy or the balance of states capabilities in the international system (Niebuhr

1962, 156, 158; Niebuhr 1964, 174; Lovin 2007, 57-58). But here in lies the crux: Niebuhr's own pessimism about love leads to this moment where Niebuhr sees *power* as a way of resolving anxiety and insecurity. Because Niebuhr is beholden to a particular security epistemology, he cannot help but abandon love and resolve issues with justice achieved via power. Therefore, Niebuhr makes several compromises that expose, sixty years on, Christian Realism to a feminist critique.

*Anxious Response: Destruction or Creativity?*

One cannot necessarily fault Niebuhr for his masculinist epistemology given what he had witnessed at the time of writing *Moral Man*—the Great Depression, World War I, and the abuses of the Soviet system—and to what he would later witness—WWII, the advent of nuclear weapons, and the Cold War. Feminists have long argued that the dependency on hard, military security is gendered as it prioritises a particular epistemic position. This position is masculinity: where power, rationality, and aggression are seen as intrinsically necessary to maintaining the stability of the international system (Tickner 1992; Sjoberg 2013). Furthermore, when this article argues that Niebuhr is gendered it means that he deprioritises the international—what works locally cannot operate internationally. He deprioritises emotion—he curtails it to the private instead of letting it complicate the public. Via both of these deprioritising moves, he gives into power politics: he only envisions operationalising love, instead of letting love to function as a way of making decisions.

Within feminist IR scholarship security is neither reflected in the prioritisation of the state system nor in the primacy of military power. Instead, security is both broader

and deeper than that. Niebuhr's focus on where love works coincides with where feminists encourage IR to pay better attention to: individual lives, economic structures, social structures and relationships all comprise security (Sjoberg 2013; Wibben 2011). Thus, discussion that centres solely upon the state and the international system is an abstraction of the reality of daily lives (Sylvester 1999). The feminist injunction the personal is political was expanded upon by Cynthia Enloe (1989) to the personal is political is international—taking this seriously is the first step in de-abstracting security and this is where Niebuhr fails to take his thinking. Enloe (2010), for instance, does this by looking at how military and war structures impact and are impacted by the lives of individuals, most recently by looking at how eight women, four American and four Iraqi, encountered the War in Iraq. Enloe's approach is easily related to the 'everyday' security discussion—where the lives of everyday individuals, living both in conflict-zones and presumed zones of peace—live out the implications of security decisions and policies every day (see also Wibben [2011] in which she argues personal narratives reveal a different encounter with security practices than what traditional IR scholarship accounts for). This could include everything from migration policies (Innes and Steele 2015), the impact of 9/11 on Muslim American women (Zahedi 2011), to domestic violence (Pain 2012; Gentry 2015b). Even more important to this discussion, however, is the inclusion of emotions into security discussions.

It took until the year 2000 for IR scholars to begin incorporating emotion into the discussion of security (Crawford 2000). Yet, Neta Crawford (2000) convincingly detailed how emotions are implicated in the study of IR and in policy-making; thus she exhorts the IR community to be cognisant of how emotions are instrumental.

Whereas the main focus of the study of emotions in IR is how emotions are the limited articulation of affect, emotions are fundamentally relational as emotions construct and sustain communities (Ahmed 2006), in both positive (Fierke 2004) and negative ways (Solomon 2012; Gentry 2015b). Thus, emotions play into and help construct previously known narratives and structures, including self/other identity and conceptualisations of security (Edkins 2004; Hutchison 2013). These structures are implicated in the reasons why Niebuhr both acknowledges the role of love as an emotion in politics but also works to minimise it.

Feminist thought offers two correctives. First, that love does have a place beyond individual relationships and, two, that emotions are necessary to ethical thinking. In the first instance, bell hooks (2000) makes the cases that due to masculinist thinking, Americans have been taught to minimise the importance of love. She offers a different vision, one where love becomes a doing—a verb—instead of a static noun. Linking it with justice, love becomes a transformational social dynamic, much like Christian theological conceptions of *agape* (whereas hooks focuses upon a romantic love). Because hooks' love is relational, it aims to dismantle power dynamics and in this sense, hooks' love is empathetic and closely tied to what Christine Sylvester has written about in IR.

While Sylvester does not directly write about love, her 'empathetic cooperation' can be related to the conceptualisation of *agape* in its desire act out of concern for the other and to minimise power dynamics. In 1994, Sylvester (1994, 317) urged IR from a feminist perspective to be more empathetic or the

process of positional slippage that occurs when one listens seriously to the

concerns, fears, and agendas of those unaccustomed to heeding when building social theory, taking on board rather than dismissing, finding in the concerns of others borderlands of one's own concerns and fears.

Sylvester's (2012, 3-4) empathic approach is developed further in her later work on war and experience, which views war from the perspective of those that experience its harms, destruction, sights, and smells, demonstrating how 'war is a politics of injury'.

Niebuhr is beholden to a particular masculinist epistemology, that shapes not just how he sees security but the value of emotions in political life. Both love and anxiety play off of each other in his writings. When Niebuhr deliberates how love would function publically, he does so in an instrumental way: that humans either build a 'loving' policy or enforce a 'loving' way upon other people. This is not love; love cannot be enacted within a policy or enforced. hooks (2000) and Sylvester (2012), as well as Christian theologians like Paul Ramsey (1954) and Timothy Jackson (2003), show us that love is a way of being and a disposition that informs a way of interacting. When Niebuhr constrains love to the private in favour of the rational ethic (even while he critiques it), Niebuhr has subjugated emotion to rationality. Rationality is a highly masculinised way of being where emotions are downplayed if not completely removed from public thinking and ethics. Therefore, the second feminist correction comes through feminist philosopher's Martha Nussbaum's (2003) querying of 'rationality' via the importance of emotion to ethical decision-making.

In *Upheavals of Thought* (2003), Nussbaum highlights how emotions were demoted in favour of rationality and logic and how this demotion was owed to the



masculine/feminine binary. Rationality, logic and stoicism were prioritised in the masculine public sphere of government and commerce. The private sphere was thought to be the complete opposite: not only were emotions curtailed to it, it was also the site of rudimentary intelligence and logic (Pateman 1980, 26; Elshtain 1983, 4-5). Thus, the masculinised public and its prioritized attributes and the feminised private with its lesser qualities exist in a gendered binary: what was masculine, including rationality, could not be feminine and vice-versa (Elshtain 1987). In this bifurcated way of thinking, 'emotions are "non-reasoning" movements, unthinking energies that simply push the person around' (Nussbaum 2003, 24). Emotions are animalistic, originating from the body (as opposed to the mind), which implies they are 'unintelligent rather than intelligent' (Nussbaum 2003, 25). Thus, Nussbaum is challenging long-standing and 'grossly inadequate' (2003, 25) masculine norms and constructs.

As a redeeming alternatives, she argues that 'emotions are forms of judgment' (Nussbaum 2003, 22, see also 19, 74-5) and a 'ri[ch] cognitive phenomena' (Nussbaum 2003, 94). Thus, in a

normative sense [emotions] are profoundly rational: for they are ways of taking in important news of the world. The suggestion that we might rid ourselves of emotions or cease to be prompted by them... suggest[s] that we should radically reorganise the sense of self that most of us have and the sort of practical rationality that helps most of us...to carry on our transactions with a world that helps or harms us' (2003, 109).

To divide emotion from rational behaviour is therefore incongruous. Indeed, Nussbaum believes emotions are necessary to ethical behaviour and in the flourishing of communities (*eudaimonia*).

Grasping how emotions impact action is ultimately an ethical proposition (Nussbaum 2003, 135). Because ‘most of the time emotions link us to items that we regard as important for our well being’ they have a particular impact on notions of personal security (Nussbaum 2003, 43). As humans are ‘ethical and social/political creature[s], emotions themselves are ethical and social/political’ (Nussbaum 2003, 149). Such a sentiment refutes Niebuhr’s desire to curtail the function of love politically. Nussbaum’s main argument is that taking account of emotions in people’s cognition and evaluations is an ethical proposition concerned with *eudaimonia*, or a person’s own flourishing (Nussbaum 2003, 22). Eudaimonistic thinking requires an epistemological evaluation of the emotions after security has been threatened or weakened. Assuming that the person doing the thinking not only values their personal and communal security, but also values the intrinsic value of *all* humans, this should require the person to take a step back and consider how best to provide for or contribute to flourishing.

In returning emotions to decision- and security-making, love can be returned to (Feminist) Christian Realism. It is not a love that Niebuhr would have described in political situations—instead it is a love that informs how individuals decide which policies or responses they are comfortable with. It is a love that is not forced upon a community or a love that is operationalised. It is an empathetic love that helps one

view a situation, create perspective, and make informed choices. It is a deeply held love and as such it helps an individual choose between destruction and creativity.

### **Returning to the Moment: Creativity**

Creativity, in much of the dominating scholarship, has been reduced to a post-Enlightenment, human-owned retelling of our own brilliance. One of the leading experts on creativity, psychiatrist and neuroscientist Nancy Andreason (2014), differentiates between two types of creativity: “little *c*” and “big *C*.” Little *c* is witnessed in “‘divergent’ thinking, or the ability to come up with many responses to carefully selected questions or probes’ (Andreason 2014, 7). “[B]ig *C*” creativity ‘focuses on people whose widely recognised creativity sets them apart from the general population,’ such as ‘writers, visual artists, musicians, inventors, business innovators, [and] scientists’ (Andreason 2014, 8). I would problematise this approach through Niebuhr—it appears self-focused and self-regarding. While this is, in many respects, *true*, it is a limited and fragmented understanding. It denies, one, that giftedness is a *gift*, and, two, that it is nurtured relationally, within a broad context of human development. Thus, Andreason’s approach is rather egotistic and it values people differently—for what they produce and the worth of what they produce, both of which are subjectively measured—and it fails to value the creativity in all people. There is an alternative perspective on creativity, one that is not located within human ingenuity per se.

### *Creativity and Theology*

Most theology on creation focuses on Genesis 1—the story of when God created the world and the creatures in it. The theology of creation and thus imagination and creativity, focus on God’s inherent nature, the iterative process of creativity, and humanity’s ability to participate in creativity, albeit in a limited way. Together, these points illuminate that creativity is relational and productive. Where most theology on creativity seems limited to the arts, this article argues that international relations itself is a creative process and it should be engaged in with positivity and hope. To do so, however, the nature of God as creator and the creation process must be understood.

While God is transcendent and ultimately unknow-able, there are things that Christianity attributes to God. The Christian God is a triune God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. The Trinity speaks to a relational God that created the world out of love and is still actively involved in it (Miner 2004, 6). For instance, the John 1: 1-5 makes the *loving* relationship between God and His Son, identified as the Word, intrinsic to the creation of the world. God not only created the world, but God participated in it by sending Christ (the Word) to live as a human as way of redeeming humankind. God desires a relationship with creation and is intimately involved in it.

While some have suggested the deist or clockmaker model—that God created the world and then ‘walked’ away—many theologians who work on creativity would argue such a model fails to account for how Scripture reveals a loving, actively engaged Trinity (McFarland 2014, 20). Instead, it is important to understand that the act of creating the world was not just one act but it is a constant activity. Creation is not yet fully realised; the world and its inhabitants (as creatures of God) are

constantly in process (McFarland 2014, 42, 58). Like secular scholarship on creativity, the creativity demonstrated by God is iterative (and one might say divergent). Because creation is ongoing and iterative, this is where humans can enter into the creative dynamic.

Although God's created the world 'from nothing' and human creativity cannot create something 'from nothing' (Miner 2004, 9-11), human creativity 'continues' the work of God (Miner 2004, 9). While much of the theological work on creativity looks at the artistic process and visual, literary, and/or musical arts (see Sayers 1941; Begbie 1991; Hart 2003), human creativity should be understood to include all labour that engages and perpetuates the work of the creator God. When a person creates, they are engaging with the Trinity. The 'Creative Idea' is 'timeless'—the artist sees both the beginning and end at once—and thus works in the 'image of the Father.' To make this idea come to fruition, it takes energy, 'sweat and passion,' and thus, emulates 'the Word.' Finally, the 'meaning of the work and its response in the lively soul...is the image of the indwelling Spirit' (Sayers 1941, 28). Therefore, humanity participates and works within the image of the triune God when it creates.

In a theologically grounded conceptualisation of creativity, all people are included, even those that are less inclined to be big *C*-creative. People engage in the creative process every day, all of the time, and most often this is simply by being a creature of God. There is perseverance—as those creating labour to make things 'right,' capturing the perfection that exists in their imagination or of those who have a creative vision to make their life and their world better. The constant reassessment inherent to creative productivity leads to substantial changes or shifts. This is why

creativity is so important to international affairs—policymakers, government officials, academics, and pundits cannot continue to go back to the same answers. Creativity is witnessed when a different approach is taken; it is just not often recognised as *creativity*. But it should be. Even if I disagree now with Niebuhr’s solutions, it was creative thinking for that particular time and in that particular epistemology. Christian Realism’s future lies in continuing to think divergently—in persistent creativity to make things better (and better still) (and still better).

### *Creativity is Imago Dei*

Creativity is deeply relational and this comes through in feminist theology, particularly the works that address how living within the *imago dei*, literally translated to ‘image of God’ but used to denote living in relationship with God and fellow humans, requires Christians to name and work against injustice. The work that best speaks to a feminist Christian Realism, in my mind, is perhaps Elshtain’s smallest and least well-known publications, *Who Are We? Critical Reflections and Hopeful Possibilities* (2000). In it, she engages with one of her most prominent latter themes: the worth and dignity of all people that is dependent upon their creatureliness. The crux of her argument is love, especially as she relates it to the *imago dei*, which translates to the ‘image of God’ but is related to how humans should be in relationship with God and other people.

Elshtain begins the volume with the Adamist account of Creation in Genesis 1:27, ‘male and female created He them.’ It is important that Adam and Eve were created simultaneously by God as this illustrates the sociality of creation: ‘we are human

insofar as we are in relationship and for the other' (Elshtain 2000, 34). Yet, before we can truly engage in our human relationships, we must be in relationship with God (Elshtain 2000, 18-9). A Christian's relationship with God then informs his/her relationship with Others—this is communion and in community there is that bounded freedom: 'Being free means "being free for the other," because the other has bound me to him' (Elshtain 2000, 15).

From this starting point, Christians care deeply and passionately for God's creation and His creatures—it is a creative relationality. Hope and expectation are communal activities (Elshtain 2000, 25, 127). The communion call for responsibility and sociality necessitates that Christians 'name things,' such as injustice, 'accurately and appropriately' (Elshtain 2000, 128). It is from creativity that Christians speak out against the 'horrors' witnessed in the world. While Elshtain, again, does not bring her argument to bear on international politics, it is Marilyn McCord Adams' (2006, 39) articulation of 'horrors,' such as racism, sexism, nationalism, genocide, rape, and torture, and what Christians are meant to do in the face of them that is particularly helpful here.

Humans are 'radically vulnerable to horrors' because God created 'us as embodied persons, personal animals, enmattered spirits in a material world of real or apparent scarcity such as this' (Adams 2006, 37). Adams (2006) repeatedly acknowledges that humans are 'social animals' (37, 66, 159, 195, 228), the inevitable corruptibility of human institutions (203, 228), and the scarcity of the material world to meet the needs of human being(s) (32–38, 66). Her recognition of the corruption as owed to human strife echoes Niebuhr—where humans are more likely to be virtuous on their own in

than in groups based upon the anxiety present in the human condition. Yet, because God loves His creation (Adams 2006, 39, 45, 49, 191, 216, 219, 226) and is attendant to it by sending Christ to participate in, move against (Adams 2006, 72), and suffer from said horrors (Adams 2006, 35, 45, 51–52, 71, 108, 189), this requires us to be equally attendant and aware of these horrors. Thus, Elshtain and Adams both make it plain that Christian's responsibility to creation means Christians draw attention to the horrors. And this requires a different epistemological framework for security, one that converges with feminist thought within IR.

### **Love Informed Creativity**

When one thinks creatively about security one does not have to be fearful that love cannot be sustained globally. When Niebuhr describes it in *Moral Man* he instrumentalises it and turns it into an ordering principle. 'Principle' has two different definitions. The first is 'a fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behaviour or for a chain of reasoning' (Google Dictionary 2016). The second is 'a general scientific theorem or law that has numerous special applications across a wide field' (Google Dictionary 2016). While love is a fundamental Christian principle foundational to Christian ethics and faith, and thus better associated with the first definition, the way in which Niebuhr discusses the limitations of love in *Moral Man* instrumentalises it. Niebuhr (1932, 60-1) implicates it in some sort of policy making. This limits love more to a 'law' than to an emotion that leads to a wider ethical behaviour. Thus, Niebuhr (1932, 61) is correct: people cannot be forced to love and act with love and if love is (en)forced upon people it is doomed to failure. Instead, love, like other emotions, should be



recognised as an acting force within domestic and global politics that guides and informs individuals, the actions they take, and the actions they wish their governments to take. Love only orders life in the sense that it leads to a personal desire to care for the other and do what is best for the other. Christians love not because their government tells them to or because they wish to see a ‘Christian’ government (although that is a tense discussion for another day), they love because they have chosen to live in relationship with the Creator and to do what has been asked of them.

The problem with love, however, is that it invites vulnerability. When one loves for the other, the needs of the other are placed above one’s own. This is a very scary proposition within IR which prioritises invulnerability via military and economic capability (Gentry 2013, 50-55; Gentry 2016a). Feminists see vulnerability, like Niebuhr, as both important and problematic. Feminist theologians treat vulnerability with a certain amount of cynicism as women’s lives have always been ones of dependency and thus vulnerability (Coakley 2002, 33). Women, as well as other raced, classed, gendered people, have been disempowered and marginalised in socio-political and economic affairs, making vulnerability a greater burden for them to bear (Hampson 1990; Yuval-Davis 1997; Coakley 2002). In the context of the historical church, women’s obligation is borne of their historical (and current) submissive vulnerability (Hampson 1990).

For feminists, vulnerability is an ontological condition as some (if not all) humans are ‘contigent[ly] susceptib[le]...to specific kinds of harm or threats by others’ (Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds 2014, 6). Vulnerability is owed to human frailty and

to the ability to be wounded (Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds 2014, 4). It is what Judith Butler (2006) terms ‘precarity’ and that humans live precarious lives precisely because we are dependent upon one another. Feminist Christian Realism is guided by this and thereby looks to see how ‘inequalities of power, dependency, capacity, or need render some agents vulnerable to harm or exploitation by others’ (Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds, 2014, 6). Feminist scholars in IR, as well as in other disciplines, utilise intersectionality, or the examination of the way gender as a power structure intersects with other power structures, such as race, class, sexuality, etc., in order to examine how power works (Steans 2013, 36; Runyan and Peterson 2013, 35). Vulnerability is particularly important to practicing Sylvester’s (1994) empathetic cooperation and it is what is recognized in focusing on the experience of war, rather than the waging of it (Sylvester 2012).

Feminist Christian Realism is particularly interested in examining how those in power maintain their power, believing that if the powerful could accept that their lives are also vulnerable, then these power dynamics will dissipate (see Coakley 2002, 35; Gentry 2013, 141). Because it is imperative to recognise that vulnerability is mutual and owed to a moment of anxiety when the Self encounters an Other, it is therefore imperative that those with power recognize it and face the obligation of according the Other their vulnerability (see Levinas 2006, 28, 64). Mutuality and a forced relationship (as that is what this encounter now entails) are not easy—there is nothing easy about encountering vulnerability. Yet, the more that humans recognise their responsibility to others, the more their responsibility grows. In both vulnerability and responsibility, the self becomes ‘obsess[ed]’ with the good of others (Levinas 2006, 64). Here perhaps is where Niebuhr’s own anxious moment fails. He so denies love

as a workable concept in politics that it abnegates this mutual responsibility between the Self and Other. Thus, it would behove those with power to think about what power is: how it operates against who or what; what are its implications; and how it can best be wielded to mitigate the Other's vulnerability as a creative act of love.

### *Creatively Forming Feminist Christian Realism*

Creativity can recognise and form other responses and the aim of Feminist Christian Realism is to creatively engage whenever the chance arises. Whereas the theology on human creativity tends to focus on the arts, music (Hart 2003; Begbie 1991), and literature (Sayers 1941), creativity in global politics must cast its net more widely. Global politics has witnessed reconciliation through the arts. For instance, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra brings young adults from across the Middle East together. Statues are erected to commemorate and ostensibly heal, such as the statue of Nelson Mandela unveiled on Reconciliation Day in South Africa. Statues are even taken down, such as the removal of British colonist Cecil Rhodes' statue in South Africa and student movement for this at Oxford. Equally, the artist Christo and his wife are known for wrapping landmarks in fabric, invoking immense aesthetic responses. When Christo and his wife wrapped the Reichstag in Berlin in 1995 'there could not be a better moment in history to wrap the Reichstag, if only because of the natural symbolism of unwrapping it now, a chrysalis out of which the new Germany may emerge' (Goldberg 1995).

*Agape* embraces strangers, neighbours, and enemies alike, bringing them into community via the Self's relationship. If we treat love as a dispositional attitude

towards the Other, then the responses to anxiety look different. Presuming we are going to opt for the creative rather than destructive choice, then a love-informed creativity will look different from a creativity where love is relegated to the private sphere. Empathy certainly seems to be central to a love-centred creative solution, as does hospitality.

Previously, I have focused upon hospitality as a way of acting with love in global politics, where hospitality was defined as ‘the deeply rooted desire to provide someone with their needs as an act of welcome, embrace, and love’ (Gentry 2013, 12). The practice of hospitality draws upon the communion of the *imago dei* to serve people and to live in community with others. Hospitality can *operate* beyond the home to extend across borders, redefining what it means to be secure and provide security (see Baker 2013; 2010). A hospitable approach to global politics refuses to see security as simply or solely limited to military strength. Military capability and a willingness to act are part of it. Yet, acting with hospitality recognises that military and other policies have an impact beyond the intended. A hospitable approach identifies the powerful’s role in burdening the world with particular horrors (Gentry 2013).

Yet, creativity is not limited to hospitality. Christian Realism tends to be focused on the moment of *insecurity* and how this provokes *anxiety*. The examples of international hospitality above point to ways that Feminist Christian Realism can operate in the moment of *insecurity*. Thus, the point of operation or the moment of interest to both forms of Christian Realism are in the moments of perceived acute tension (although the East-West Divan Orchestra also operates in a moment of acute

tension, it just so happens to often operate *away* from it). If one ponders a moment of acute anxiety and insecurity, there is perhaps no more anxious moment in global politics today than the fear of terrorism (Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Greenberg 2002).

Terrorism is, by definition, dependent upon anxiety—the ‘terror’ is owed to the indiscriminate and indeterminate nature of where and when the next terror attack will happen (see Schmid and Jongman 2006, 5; Braithwaite 2013). Anxiety is a tricky, complex emotion and most often related to the simpler emotions of fear and worry (see Kerr 1988; Bowen 1993). For instance, an individual may be fear the presence of a spider, but an individual suffering from arachnophobia anxiously fears the possibility of spiders (as well as the actual spiders). Anxiety is about anticipated events or activities (Kerr 1988, 48; Massumi 2005, 35; Ahmed 2006, 67). Anxiety then becomes more about the unknown and the uncertain and less about actuality (Bowen 1993; Huddy et al. 2005, 593, 595). Terrorism generates an anxious fear because of the anticipation of a possible attack or ‘unknown knowns’ in the words of Secretary Donald Rumsfeld (see Massumi 2005; Daase and Kessler 2007; Gentry 2015a).

The anxious response to terrorism is often far more destructive than creative. The anxiety over terrorism also generates problematic responses via overly destructive counter-terrorism responses (Huddy et al. 2005; Gentry 2015a). In the past 15 years, the War on Terror, the human rights abuses at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, and Bagram are egregious. Domestic policy is also harmful. Much of the anxiety over terrorism is focused upon neo-Orientalism and the racialised fear of (radical) Muslims. For example, the UK’s counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation policy,

Prevent, is critiqued for turning Muslim communities into suspect communities, where all Muslims are treated like potential criminals/terrorists (Heath-Kelly 2013). It has led to the fear of migrants and the rejection of settling certain migrants from residing in several US states. It is witnessed in the asinine comments of Donald Trump that certain parts of London are no-go areas because they are controlled by (radical) Muslims. These responses are anxious and fearful, blocking any attempt for empathy and care to flourish.

Thus, what might a creative response to a terrorist threat look like? First, it is to recognise that of the 500 attacks in Europe between 2009 and 2013, only two percent were perpetrated by radical Islamists (Ahmed 2015). This would hopefully lead governments and the media to stop treating entire communities as problems. It would at one and the same time recognise that the threats are more diverse than coming from a single community *and* that the anxious fear of terrorism grossly overestimates the severity of the threat. For instance, an American is more likely to die from slipping in the bathtub (464 in 2013) than by terrorist attack (17 in 2014) (Kristof 2016).

Second, creativity could involve being more tolerant of those seen as a threat or those who threaten. When the first reports came in of a bombing and shooting attack in Norway came in, the immediate presumption was that the attacks were by radical Islamists. Instead, it came out that Anders Breivik, a white supremacist, was solely responsible for the single-largest security event in Norway since World War II. At least one in four Norwegians knew one of the 77 people killed in Breivik's car bombing of a government building in Oslo and his island massacre of teenage summer campers. He wounded around another 319 people. Even in relation to the

numerous lone-gunmen attacks in the US this is monumental: Breivik killed and wounded 396 people in one day.

Two days later, Prime Minister Stoltenberg gave an address at Oslo Cathedral. As a eulogy it demarcates a time for mourning and peace, not a call to action. However, it has continued to stand as a marked event that separates Norway's response to terror apart from the US (post-9/11) and the UK (post-7/7) (Orange 2012) and now in contrast to the Paris 2015 and Brussels 2016 attacks. Even while Norwegian officials were still discovering all of the dead and wounded, Stoltenberg stated that once all of the identities of victims were known, '[a]t that point, the evilness will come forth in all its horror.' He continued,

We are a small country, but a proud people. We are still shaken over what struck us. But we will never give up our values. Our answer is more democracy, more openness, and more humanity. But never naivety.

...[paraphrasing a camper interviewed by CNN, he continues:] If one man can show that much hate, imagine how much love we can all show together (Stoltenberg 2011).

While showing this love is more difficult in public life, it could be argued that, even while taking security concerns seriously, the Norwegian state has continued to be true to this. Breivik was sentenced to 21-years in prison with the possibility of five-year extensions if he continues to pose a threat to society. Norway has given Breivik every legal measure he is owed: the Oslo District Court even recently ruled that the prison system had violated his human rights under the European Commission due to his limited contact with others (Henley 2016).

Some elements of Stolenberg's address echo 'What We're Fighting For,' the letter written and signed by US academics and public intellectuals in 2002 to support the war in Afghanistan. The letter promoted American values of freedom of religion, democracy, and civil rights and liberties placing them in opposition to al Qaeda and the Taliban. They end the letter by promising to guard the US against all of the 'harmful temptations—especially those of arrogance and jingoism—to which nations at war so often seem to yield.' Sadly, those that signed the letter were against an administration that was all too willing to create a Manichean vision from which followed harm: the stretching of both the ethos of the Just War tradition and then domestic and international law on civil liberties, torture, targeted killings, and extraordinary rendition.

It would be far too easy to enumerate the ways in which Norway can get 'away' with responding to a terrorist event with 'love' or the ways the US 'cannot' respond with love. These restrictions for or against are truisms of our own making. Responses when the peace is breeched can change. Security practices can change. It is a matter of whether the conventional epistemic security frame will allow us to enter into a new conversation in which an extension of hospitality or an act of courageous love are allowed to function and to flourish. When countering terrorism or enacting any other security issue it is imperative to recognise the security-seeker's response dictates future events. The US's decision to contain the Soviet Union by arming the *mujahideen* had long-term, high-cost implications. If that lesson had been learned twenty-five years ago then fighting an ill-advised war in Iraq and arming its enemy's-enemy in Syria, then the rise of IS would not be such a surprise.



Creativity requires a different level of response—one that considers love, power, and vulnerability at a different epistemic level. The cost-benefit is not at the abstracted international level or even in what such actions do for the Self versus the Other. Instead, it is a consideration for how the wielding of power impacts people and the socio-economic situation, amongst other factors, in the longer term. For instance, drone strikes appear to be low cost: they save putting boots on the ground. Yet it is well documented that drone strikes are engendering hatred towards the US, causing trauma in the population, and politicising people (Woods 2012). This is not helpful in the long run.

No Christian Realist would consider the injustices of the War on Terror a proper or creative solution. These are extremes. A love-informed creativity, however, enables a Feminist Christian Realism to think further ahead, to grasp the implications of how our policies impact those around us and those most vulnerable to the wielding of power. There will always be limits to acting, but this does not prevent the attempt to think about the world we want future generations to inherit.

## **Conclusion**

Feminist Christian Realism derives its onus from a theological understanding of creativity. Creativity is enabled through humanity's relationship with God; it is the product of living within the *imago dei*. Living in relationship with God requires Christians to be engaged with the world—to love it enough to be troubled by the

injustices that are witnessed. And thus love can be an guiding principle in navigating international politics.

Love strengthens and enables Christians to speak out against the horrors: racism, sexism, social-phobias, political harm. Love provides the will for us to practice hospitality, to attempt to downplay one's own power and to mitigate one's own vulnerability, and, by doing so, affirm and minimise the vulnerability of others. It does so in expectant hope that creation can be made better, not perfectly whole, but better. It does so believing that in this position of strength Feminist Christian Realism can offer holistic alternatives to conflict and violence.

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<sup>i</sup> This also coheres with scholarship on vulnerability from Judith Butler (2006) and Emanuel Levinas (2006) as will be discussed later.

<sup>ii</sup> Niebuhr's 'realism' is more in line with classical realism and his work heavily influenced Hans Morgenthau's (1978) own realism. Since Niebuhr's belief that conflict stems from the human condition, of wanting to be a perfect being and yet unable to recognize human fallibility, Morgenthau's belief that conflict stems from human nature is quite similar. This is the point of departure for Kenneth Waltz, however. When Waltz wrote *Man, the State, and War* (1959) and later *Theory of International Politics* (1979), he was attempting to correct realism's focus upon human nature as the cause of conflict. Yet, his focus on the third-level, of the anarchic nature of the international system being the permissive cause of war, articulated a new form of realism, neo- or structural realism (see also Gentry 2013, 65-66).